



**Department of Veterans Affairs (VA)
VA MIDWEST HEALTH CARE NETWORK
Veterans Integrated Service Network (VISN) 23
Network Update
February 2013
www.visn23.va.gov**



[VA Disability Claims Initiative Reduces Processing Time](#)

VHA and VBA working together to better serve Veterans

A new Initiative recently launched by VA may eliminate the need for in-person medical examinations for some Veterans and shorten the time it takes to process Veterans' disability compensation claims. The Acceptable Clinical Evidence (ACE) initiative was developed by the Veterans Health Administration (VHA) and the Veterans Benefits Administration (VBA) in a joint effort to provide a Veteran-centric approach for disability examinations. Use of the ACE process opens the possibility of doing assessments without an in-person examination when there is sufficient information in the medial record.

The ACE initiative is part of VBAs agency-wide Transformation Plan – a five-year, multifaceted organizational change based on more than 40 personnel, process and technology initiatives designed to improve claims processing. The goal is to eliminate the claims backlog and process all claims within 125 days with 98 percent accuracy in 2015. To learn more go to:
<http://benefits.va.gov/transformation/>



African Americans Proud Legacy of Service

From Bunker Hill and the Forts of South Carolina to the Mountains of Afghanistan, African Americans have served with honor throughout our history. Black Soldiers helped bring peace to the Plains and defeat Fascism in Europe. They charged up San Juan Hill, shot down Japanese Zeros at Pearl Harbor and aimed for new heights at Tuskegee. By the end of the 20th Century an African American had risen to command the mightiest military force in the World. But African Americans have also had to fight for their right to defend their country and to receive fair and equal treatment in the military. The legacy of their struggles and their courage of service helped our nation realize its highest ideals of freedom.

Join us in February as our nation celebrates Black History by learning more about the courage and sacrifice of African American Veterans. Take time and explore their history of service.

In 2011 the Department of Veterans Affairs produced an 8 minute film to illustrate contributions by African American in our nation's military. The film, [The History of Black Economic Empowerment](#)" is posted on our website at www.visn23.va.gov for easy viewing.

Influenza Update - Step Up to Prevent Flu



It is not too late to get your flu vaccine. If you are 65 years of age or older, you may be able to get the high dose flu vaccine, manufactured for persons aged 65 years and older. Ask your provider if this is available at your facility. States within our Network (MN, ND, SD, IA, & NE) have experienced high levels of influenza activity during the month of January, as have other states across the U.S. Compared to typical influenza seasons this year's Flu season started one-to-two months earlier. The number of hospitalizations and the percent of patients going to clinics for flu-like symptoms in December were reported to be three times higher than in past years and Flu activity is expected to continue for at least several more weeks. Since January 2013, influenza activity within the Network has been decreasing but outbreaks continue to be

reported. VA staff remain vigilant in following comprehensive, established infection prevention protocols to prevent the spread of infection when isolated outbreaks occurs.

Flu is a respiratory illness that spreads easily. It is caused by viruses that can change from year to year. Each year in the U.S., flu causes more than 226,000 hospitalizations and about 36,000 deaths. Even though most of these cases are among people age 65 and older, anyone can get the flu. This is why it is important for all of us to "step up" and help stop the spread of flu! The best way to stop the flu is by getting vaccinated. For more information on this year's flu virus log on to the Center for Disease Control website at

www.cdc.gov/flu/weekly

Fort Snelling Upper Post Project to Help Homeless Veterans



More than 50 people attended a public meeting on Jan. 23 to hear the plans Minneapolis VA Health Care System has to renovate five historic buildings for housing 58 homeless Veterans on the Upper Post of Fort Snelling. The buildings date back to the early 1900s. Two of the larger buildings served as horse stables for the American cavalry, and two others were quartermaster quarters. The buildings have not been used since WW II. CommonBond Communities, the Midwest's largest nonprofit provider of affordable housing, received an

Enhanced Use Lease (EUL) to restore the buildings as part of the VA's Building Utilization Review and Repurposing (BURR) initiative. The BURR initiative is a VA strategic effort to identify and repurpose underused VA land and buildings to support VA's goal to end Veteran homelessness. The initiative assesses existing federal real estate with the potential to develop new housing opportunities for homeless Veterans through public-private partnerships and VA's EUL program. The project is within the boundaries of the Fort Snelling Historic District, which is listed on the National Register of Historic Places. CommonBond presented architectural renderings at the Jan 23 meeting. The project may begin in spring 2013 with completion in 2014.

Minneapolis VA Receives \$217,000 in Grants to Enhance Programs for Women

The Department of Veterans Affairs recently awarded 33 grants to VA facilities, including the University of Minnesota Health Care System, for projects that will improve emergency health care services for women Veterans, expand women's health education programs for VA staff, and offer telehealth programs to female Veterans in rural areas. The Minneapolis VA projects include:



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- \$19,900 for Women's Health Primary Care Nursing Mini Residency in May 2013 - The target audience includes women's health and primary care nursing staff who would like to care for women Veterans and want to update their basic skills (including RNs, LPNs).
- \$173,074 for Women's Health Tele-pharmacy - Funds will support a dedicated Women's Health Clinical Pharmacy Specialist (CPS) who will use videoconference to provide women's health-specific pharmacotherapy services (e.g., contraceptive counseling, menopause symptom management), as well as chronic disease management services to reduce health disparities among women Veterans. The Women's Health CPS will also be available for telephone or tele-video consultation with Community Based Outpatient Clinic (CBOC) primary care providers.
- \$24,125 in salary support for Minneapolis to serve as an expansion site for the Maternity Care Coordination Telehealth pilot funded at Greater Los Angeles.

This is the largest number of one-year grants VA has ever awarded for enhancing women's health services. Telehealth concepts that received grants involve tele-mental health, tele-gynecology, tele-pharmacy, and telephone maternity care coordination. The grant program is part of VA's continuing effort to improve access and quality of care for the increasing number of women Veterans seeking care at VA. Women serve in every branch of the military, representing 15 percent of today's active duty military and nearly 18 percent of National Guard and Reserve forces. By 2020, VA estimates women Veterans will constitute 10 percent of the Veteran population. Visit www.va.gov/womenvet and www.womenshealth.va.gov to learn more about VA programs and services for women Veterans.

National Salute to Veteran Patients Week is February 10-16



During Valentine's week all of our VA Health Care Systems have special events planned to salute the men and women who come to the VA for medical care. It is a time when the community is reminded of VA volunteer opportunities for serving those who have served. On February 9, the Sioux Falls VA Medical Center will host one of fourteen Valentines for Veterans concerts scheduled throughout the country. These concerts, made possible by the generous support of many organizations, businesses, and volunteers, bring together the community for one common purpose

– to celebrate the sacrifices made by our Veterans and their families. For more information on how you can participate in National Salute activities contact Voluntary Service.

Veterans Crisis Line

The Veterans Crisis Line connects Veterans in crisis, and their families and friends, with qualified, caring, Department of Veterans Affairs responders through a confidential toll-free number. If you or anyone you know is in crisis, call 1-800-273-8255, [or use the 24/7 Veterans online chat](#). No Veteran should resort to suicide. Veterans who dedicated their lives to preserving freedom for Americans should never feel so hopeless that they would want to end their life, but it happens. At some point in everyone's life, we all...hit a wall. That's why VA has the [Veterans Crisis Line](#). This website explains it all: www.veteranscrisisline.net.



Calendar of Events – February – March 2013

Every Friday at [Sioux Falls VA Health Care System](#) -Interested in quitting smoking or chewing tobacco? Drop-in classes are offered every Friday at the Sioux Falls VA from 2:00-3:00 pm. No appointments needed.

February 6: [VA Black Hills Health Care System](#) - [Veteran Resource Fair](#) Veterans and their families are invited to the Hot Springs VA Medical Center to meet with businesses and organizations that provide services Veterans can take advantage of.

February 9: [Sioux Falls VA Health Care System](#) -[Valentines for Veterans](#) The Sioux Falls Dept. of Veterans Affairs will host its first Valentines for Veterans concert featuring country Valentines for Veterans concert February 9, 3:00 pm at the Washington Pavilion in Sioux Falls. This first concert for Sioux Falls features James Wesley, country music recording star. A Veterans resource fair will also take place before and after the concert (1:00-3:00 PM and 5:00-5:30 PM).

February 10: [VA Black Hills Health Care System](#) - [Four Chaplains Memorial Service](#) 1:30 PM - 2:30 pm (MST) St. Francis of Assisi Parrish Church, Sturgis, SD. VA Black Hills Health Care System invites the public to participate in the observance of National Salute to Hospitalized Veterans and the Four Chaplains memorial service

February 8: [VA Minneapolis Health Care System](#) – [Red Cross Blood Donation](#) 9:00 am – 2:00 pm, Flag Atrium

February 12: [VA Minneapolis Health Care System](#) – [Red Cross Blood Donation](#), 11:30 am – 5:25 pm, Flag Atrium

February 13: [St. Cloud VA Health Care System](#) - [Local Veterans Art Show](#) St. Cloud VA Hosts Local Veterans Art Competition and Show. Printable brochures are available for distribution, contact Barry Venable, Public Affairs Officer for more information.

February 13: [Nebraska Western Iowa Health Care System](#) – 6:00-7:00 pm [Veterans Information Forum](#), VA CBOC auditorium, 600 S. 70th St. Lincoln, Nebraska

February 16 - [Sioux Falls VA Health Care System](#) 23rd annual VA Variety Show, Sioux Falls VA auditorium. This variety show highlights the talents of Veterans, volunteers, and VA employees. Previous shows have included instrumental and vocal music, magic, comedy, skits, and puppetry.

March 2 - [Sioux Falls VA Health Care System](#) - The quarterly service of remembrance for recently deceased Veterans will be held at 1:30 PM in the front foyer of the Sioux Falls VA Medical Center.

March 6, 11, and 18 – [Fargo VA Health Care System](#) – [Healthy Living Classes](#), 12:30-3:00 pm (CST), Jamestown VA Clinic

For More information, call the Network Office at (651) 405-5600 or
Log on at www.visn23.va.gov or email sharyl.schaepe@va.gov